NRCS Species for Plant Collections 2006

Schizachyrium scoparium

Scientific Name: *Schizachyrium scoparium* (Michx.) Nash.
Common Name: Little bluestem

L. Glasscock.
USDA SCS. 1991

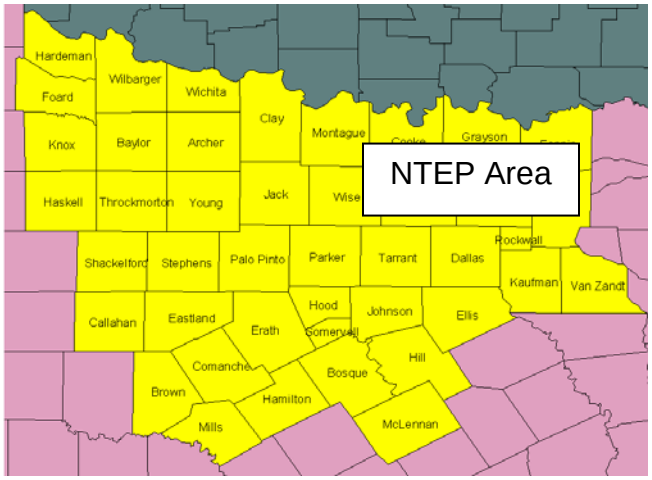
Morphological Characteristics

A native, perennial, warm season, long-lived bunchgrass. Culms are 1 to 4 feet tall, erect and large tufted, having occasional short rhizomes. Basal stems and sheaths are flattened. Leaf blades are hairless; V shaped in cross section, keeled, light blue-green when young turning reddish brown at maturity. Ligules 1/16 inch in length, membranous, with singed margins. Inflorescence consists of several unbranched racemes, one on the end of each seed stalk. Spikelets are paired along raceme axis; fertile one plump, awned and stalkless; sterile one stalked, awnless or awn tipped.

Little bluestem has a deep fibrous root system, and may be semi-sod forming in sub humid zones. As a warm season grass it begins growth in late spring and continues through the hot summer period until the first killing frost. It is easily mistaken for common broomsedge (*Andropogon virginicus*) except little bluestem has very flat bluish basal shoots. Broomsedge has a straight awn and has two or more stalked seed clusters per branch. Little bluestem has a twisted, bent awn and a single cluster of seeds per branch. Seacoast bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium* var. *littorale*) occurs only in the coastal plain region. It is very similar to little bluestem but can be distinguished by the bent stems at the base, whereas little bluestem stems are erect.

Little bluestem is one of the most widely distributed native grasses in North America. It will grow on a wide variety of soils but is very well adapted to well drained, medium to dry, infertile soils. The plant has excellent drought and fair shade tolerance, and fair to poor flood tolerance. It grows preferentially on sites with pH 7.0 and slightly higher.

Conservation Use



Why collect this plant?
In north-central Texas there is a lack of locally-adapted native (ecotypic) plant materials for use in revegetation projects. The **North Texas Ecotype Project (NTEP)** was established to conserve the culturally, historically, and ecologically important native plants of north-central Texas, and promote their use for revegetation projects.

The Knox City Plant Materials Center in cooperation with **NTEP** have identified little bluestem as a plant meeting project objectives. Plant and seed collections supporting **NTEP** are targeted for 43 counties located within all or portions of 6 vegetation areas in north-central Texas including: Blackland Prairie, East Cross Timbers, Fort Worth Prairie, Lampasas Cut Plain, West Cross Timbers and Rolling Plains.

Future ecotypes developed will benefits the following conservation practice standards: 645 Upland Wildlife Habitat Management; 342 Critical Area Planting; 562 Recreation Area Improvement; 550 Range Planting; 327 Conservation Cover; 643 Restoration and Management of Rare or Declining Habitats.

Your assistance in collecting this plant helps support the NRCS conservation practice standards which are employed daily to conserve the natural resources of Texas!

Centers Requesting Seed

Knox City Plant Materials Center
(only from the 43 counties located within the North Texas Ecotype Project)
http://www.tarleton.edu/~netp/index.html see link for more information.

How to Collect Seed

1. Identify native plant stands in your area. You can go to the following websites for helpful photos http://plants.usda.gov or http://www.noble.org/imagegallery/index.html or www.wildflower.org
2. Determine if seed is mature. Mature seed is typically dry and will easily separate from the seed head.
3. Hand strip mature seed by grasping the bottom of the seed head then gently pulling away from the base of the plant. Deposit seed in a brown paper sack. Collect seed from a minimum of 30 to 50 plants.
4. Label each collection as it is made so collections do not get mixed up. Information required includes: Collector's name, number of plants collected, location (parish, city, highway, and GPS coordinates), site description (soil type, slope, and plants growing in association).
5. Complete NRCS-ECS-580; Plant Collection Information Form and mail with collected seeds to the NRCS Plant Materials Center requesting the species.

Knox City Plant Materials Center
3776 FM 1292
Knox City, TX 79529-2514

Helpful Tips

Look for superior plants that display differences in color, height, or forage abundance and record observations. Differences in growing site or location should be made into separate collections if they are separated by more than 1 mile between sites.

Other Photos

L. Glasscock. USDA SCS. 1991. *Southern wetland flora: Field office guide to plant species*. South National Technical Center, Fort Worth, TX. Courtesy of USDA NRCS Wetland Science Institute.